

Connecting People Technology and Ideas

WTN Interview with Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin:

Facilitating technology growth and regional economic development is a priority

By Mike Klein, Editorial Director

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Editor's Note: I had the opportunity to speak with Congresswomen Tammy Baldwin at her Madison office about her involvement in bringing more federal dollars to Wisconsin for technology development, as well as how we can spur more regionally-based economic development on the federal and state level.

U.S. Representative Tammy Baldwin continues to help bring home federal dollars to Wisconsin to help fuel the growth of technology in the state. Following last week's announcement that Congresswomen Baldwin assisted UW-Rock County to secure \$100,000 for new computers systems, Baldwin has announced that Stratatech Corporation and Virent Technologies, both based in Madison, will receive federal grants of \$2 million to further their cutting edge research and product development efforts.

Although Baldwin is best known for her unwavering commitment to farmers, senior citizens, education, veterans, women's rights and the environment, she is emerging as a leader in the Wisconsin technology community.

(See the end of the story for how representative Baldwin's office can assist you with the federal grants and appropriations process.)

WTN: What are you doing to bring more federal dollars to Wisconsin?

TB: There is a legacy in Wisconsin of "Golden Fleece." We made a conscious decision when I came into office and was confronted with my first appropriations cycle. We had to make a decision to go for earmarks or not? And we made a very clear decision, that absolutely. Along as that game is played in Washington, why leave the Second Congressional District in Wisconsin behind? I have energetically gone forth to try to secure a variety of types of federal grant dollars in each budget cycle for projects in my district.

WTN: What types of federal funds are you pursuing?

TB: They have run the gamut from millions of dollars cumulatively for affordable housing in this area to the redesign of State Street which will be a real draw to the immediate area, to helping a small tiny hospital in Darlington to replace its radiology suite. It became very apparent to us early on in my first term that there were many other worthy projects that were not going to be eligible for federal earmarking opportunities but might very well be eligible for federal grants that are awarded on a competitive basis. One of the reasons we were not getting those dollars in this congressional district was because many small entities do not have a grant person on staff or don't even have a part-time person to scour the federal register.

WTN: How can you help companies in your district with grants?

TB: If we know about their goals, ambitions and dreams and we have a dedicated staff on board that can match folks up with the grant process. We have a system that works in a number of ways. Businesses and non-profits can call us and say, "we do X and we are looking for some funding for this. Can you scour what is out there and see if there is any homeland security funding that might be appropriate for this project or if there's a way we can provide this service to the federal government? Or would the federal government be interested in procuring this product?"

All these programs have a full complex set of rules and regulations. It is my pleasure to be a liaison to businesses and non-profits in the district and walk them through what can be a cumbersome set of rules and regulations. An example is to be on a procurement list for defense. We have developed an expertise and we market that expertise, and we have also worked with organizations that have that freestanding expertise. There are a variety of folks who do this sort of thing like at UW-Whitewater. We refer back and forth when these issues come up.

WTN: What advice can you give companies seeking federal appropriations?

TB: We occasionally get requests for help at the wrong time. When the process is already well underway and somebody says, "I just heard about this idea..."

For business and non-profits that do not have the resources internally to monitor the federal budget process, that's the service we offer. We walk businesses and non-profits through the appropriations process and the competitive grant process and are of assistance to them. That is a good liaison role for a federal representative.

WTN: What are examples of funding you have targeted?

TB: It may be SBA funding; defense funding, or it may be FEMA funding. We have gotten night vision goggles for volunteer fire departments that they could have never have gotten otherwise.

WTN: How can we be more effective in getting more federal dollars to Wisconsin?

TB: After reading and studying the latest thinking on how we can be competitive with other regions of the country in the future, it is very clear to me that we must do a greater job of fostering regional collaboration, and stop competing as Chicago versus Madison or Milwaukee versus Madison, and start collaborating.

We should say, "If you want this (federal funding) to come to the region, it maybe will not

be in my congressional district. But, how is it going to benefit people in my congressional district if our region flourishes?"

WTN: How could this regional process of getting more federal dollars work?

TB: In my mind, when I started applying some real thought to this (and my staff has too), this works just as well if not even better at the congressional level.

Wisconsin is a small state, 5 million people with 8 congressional representatives in the House. We can't win in a tug of war against California, Florida or New York. We may be strong but we are only eight House representatives and California has 53.

But, what happens if we do that teaming up with Illinois and Chicago? Not only do we add a whole bunch of people in terms of electoral power, we also add some senior folks (elected representatives).

If you look at the core of the country (Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota), you have the Speaker of the House; you have some of the highest-ranking members and chairmen of critical committees that are pieces of this. And they should have the parochial interest of joining. So this term in Congress, I'll start broaching this one-by-one with members of the congressional delegation that are in this ideal core to work together rather than competitively with one another.

I am just at the beginning stages but there have been great conversations with Republicans as well as liberal Democrats, and I have not had anyone pooh-pooh the idea yet. I have a long way to go. To me this could be a really promising thing!

WTN: How would you structure and build a coalition?

TB: First of all I would let their personal (regional representatives) interests help to drive it.

WTN: What are you proposing?

TB: One is to do a thorough job of recognizing our regional assets and our regional deficits. And after we have the list, we should all talk about the assets of our region, even if they are not in our district. We should take ownership of the region's assets.

Then on the list of deficits, if there is an opportunity to pass legislation to make that deficit into an asset, we can say, "let's work together as a regional delegation to do that."

Let's take the Midwest high-speed rail initiative. If you could jump on a train in Madison (which you cannot for Amtrak), and get to Milwaukee or Chicago in little time with your laptop open and with your cell phone on and doing business, that would be a huge asset for our region.

WTN: What are the challenges?

TB: We haven't necessarily had all the folks who would be beneficially affected by this work together to make that happen. This is an element that would have enormous economic development potential if it were in place.

We have our charters in this Congress...and a lot of them. It takes time to learn each person's interest and what keeps him or her up at night. Discovering this is how you take the next steps to build cooperation and collaboration.

We need to look at local versus federal responsibilities that might be transportation infrastructure issues or other types of funding such as from the Department of Defense, Homeland Security or the FDA. That is one thing that I would put in front of this group of members of Congress.

WTN: What is an example of how this might work?

TB: If you're a small company and trying to get FDA approval for human trials for a drug you want to bring to market, you almost have to be bought by one of the "big guys" (Pharma) in order to do it. If all the small (drug development) organizations could share a facility, it would leverage and attract people (and companies) here because there is a facility that they could all use. That is a proposal that is out there.

WTN: How can you work with the governors to foster interstate cooperation?

TB: The three states that we are talking about for a coalition, Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota, all have new governors.

There is new energy, new blood there and yet it is going to take a while to figure out what is on their agendas.

I sat down with Governor Jim Doyle and talked about the things I am working on and excited about. We talked about regional economic development. I know he has been leading on this issue, especially in borderline areas like Beloit as well and the southeast part of the state. I see him and know he is absolutely a full partner in moving forward with these ideas. I know he has some important things he has been working on recently, but I see him as a strong partner for this initiative.

Editor's Closing Note: Tammy Baldwin Resources for Grants or Loans:

Local governments, non-profits and private businesses are eligible for a variety of federal grants and loans. To find out more about these programs and see if you qualify, Tammy Baldwin urges her constituents to first check her website (<http://tammybaldwin.house.gov/index.asp>) and click on "How I Can Help" and then choose grants. Or go direct to (<http://www.tammybaldwin.house.gov/page.asp?page=Grants>). If you apply for a grant or loan and want assistance, Baldwin's staff in Madison can assist with a letter or support, direct you to other resource and get you more information.

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